

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
HARTFORD**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Interim Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** February 4, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Discussion Materials: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)  
Flexibility (Waiver) Renewal Discussion with the State Board of Education

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction/Background**

Through its iterative Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility process, the U.S. Education Department (USED) has enabled states to replace selected components of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act with state-developed solutions. In return for this flexibility, USED required states to develop and implement plans that maintain a high bar for student achievement and accountability.

Specifically, USED requires each waiver state to adopt and use high-quality, college- and career-ready standards and assessments; to create a strong system of school accountability that highlights achievement gaps and enables interventions in low-performing schools; and to implement educator evaluation and support systems. Specific programmatic requirements are associated with each of these commitments.

Connecticut's flexibility request was granted in June 2012. To keep and extend its waiver, Connecticut must submit a Flexibility Renewal Request by March 31, 2015, that will cover the academic years through 2017-18. This Flexibility Renewal Request must highlight proposed modifications to our original request approved in June 2012 and document the engagement of stakeholders.

Connecticut's request, like the state's initial application, is divided into three sections, or principles. Summaries of the key components of each principle and the modifications currently under consideration follow below.

**Principle 1: College- and Career-Ready Expectations for All Students**

Principle 1 requires waiver states to adopt college- and career-ready academic standards, as well as high-quality assessments aligned to these standards.

Connecticut's 2015 renewal request will document the CSDE's continued implementation of the Connecticut Core Standards and the associated Smarter Balanced Assessment system, which will

be administered statewide in March 2015. Activities launched to help teachers and school systems transition to the new standards and assessments will also be detailed.

As part of its commitment to high-quality standards and assessments, the CSDE has undertaken the following ongoing activities:

- Actively engaged stakeholders using multiple pathways, including meetings, committees, councils, conferences, surveys, newsletters, the launch of the website [ctcorestandards.org](http://ctcorestandards.org), communication toolkits, and parent materials translated into the top seven languages spoken by Connecticut students.
- Worked with the Governor's Common Core State Standards Taskforce, which studied successful implementation practices and made recommendations to highlight needed strategic actions.
- Provided unprecedented supports for standards implementation in the form of hundreds of teacher minigrants up to \$2,000 each; 1,200 days of customized, in-district coaching and technical assistance; teacher access to the Smarter Balanced Digital Library of resources; \$34 million in technology upgrades for local education agencies; and 20,000 copies of an instructional guide for school and district leaders.
- Deployed a statewide professional development system focused on the significant instructional shifts needed to achieve mastery of new standards at each grade level; delivery of supportive instruction for English learners (EL) and students with disabilities; and the strategies, tools, and knowledge school and district administrators will require to lead the transition to the new standards. To date, over 1,000 coaches have been trained, and thousands of educators have participated in regional and/or online professional development.
- Provided dozens of workshops on the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, including assessment literacy, digital library resources, and critical training titled, "Connecting the Assessment Claims to Classroom Instruction." This training emphasizes that the best preparation for annual testing is high-quality curriculum and teaching to the standards.
- After receiving federal approval to grant local district choice on the administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) Field Test or legacy assessments in 2014, Connecticut successfully implemented the Smarter Balanced Field Test to 90% of Connecticut school districts.
- The first operational administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment for students in Grades 3-8 and 11 will occur in spring 2015.

To obtain continued approval from the USED, Connecticut must make the following commitments:

- Connecticut will adopt English language proficiency (ELP) standards aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards and will administer similarly aligned ELP assessments.
- Connecticut will administer alternate assessments aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- Connecticut will report annually to the public on college-going and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and subgroups of students in each local education agency (LEA) and public high school.

The CSDE plans to propose the following in its 2015 Flexibility Renewal Request:

- Continue with the Connecticut Core Standards, new standards in other academic areas, and the Smarter Balanced Assessments.
- Pending the recommendation of the High School Assessment Working Group, potentially seek flexibility to use an alternate assessment in lieu of the Grade 11 Smarter Balanced test.
- To exempt recently arrived English learner (EL) students who have attended schools in the United States for fewer than two years from the performance component of the state's accountability system.

### **Principle 2: State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support**

Principle 2 provides states with the opportunity to propose to the USED the creation of customized accountability systems for schools and districts. Marking a significant break from the one-size-fits-all approach of NCLB, these systems may use multiple measures to recognize school and district performance, and enable tailored interventions and supports.

Following its initial waiver approval in 2012, Connecticut began implementing a new accountability system in fall 2012 that introduced a performance index, raised expectations, integrated all tested subjects, made achievement gaps more transparent, and classified all schools.

Over the past two years, the CSDE has actively sought feedback regarding this system through close collaboration with district and school leaders and other stakeholders, forums for Connecticut educators, consultation with state and national experts, input from Department staff, and analysis of the system's implementation. This process revealed several areas for further refinement and improvement.

As part of the efforts to implement Connecticut's next-generation accountability system, the CSDE undertook the following activities:

- Implemented a post-NCLB accountability system in 2012.
- Identified low-performing districts and schools to enable interventions and supports, including the Commissioner's Network.
- Classified all schools and issued new performance reports, along with a companion document for parents to assist in understanding the new reports.
- Consulted extensively with stakeholders and analyzed the effectiveness of the new system.
- Created and implemented a plan to align data reporting with accountability.

To obtain continued approval from the USED, Connecticut must make the following commitments to USED:

- Demonstrate continuous improvement to its accountability system.
- Ensure that the system continues to incorporate for all students and subgroups: student achievement, graduation rates, and school performance and progress over time.
- Update the list of Turnaround and Focus schools, as well as identify new Schools of Distinction, using results from the new model by January 31, 2016.

- The accountability system will not assign schools to the highest category if there are significant achievement or graduation rate gaps.

The CSDE plans to propose the following in its 2015 Flexibility Renewal Request:

- Changes to Connecticut's school and district accountability system to provide a more holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance. The elements of the proposal are as follows:
  - Include academic growth of the same students over time.
  - Refine existing metrics to better reflect overall performance and make subgroup performance metrics more impactful and actionable.
  - Add indicators for college- and career-readiness.
  - Incorporate indicators focused on the delivery of a well-rounded education such as civics, arts, and fitness.
  - Adjust the classification methodology to better represent overall school performance and to better target interventions and support.
- Update exit criteria for schools identified in the 2012 waiver as Focus, Priority, and Review schools:
  - Turnaround schools
    - Turnaround schools identified before the 2015-16 school year that perform above the bottom 10 percent of schools on statewide assessments in math and English language arts (ELA) will exit Turnaround status.
    - Turnaround schools newly identified under the proposed model before February 2016 will exit Turnaround status after demonstrating three consecutive years of progress in the following ways:
      - Increases in overall percentage of points earned.
      - Meeting annual performance index targets for all students in all applicable subject areas.
      - High schools must also meet the six-year cohort graduation rate target for all students.
  - Focus schools
    - Focus schools identified before the 2015-16 school year with High Needs subgroups performing better than the bottom 10 percent on statewide ELA and math tests will exit the Focus category.
    - Focus schools newly identified under the proposed model before February 2016 will exit the Focus category if they have met their High Needs subgroup performance targets for the most recent two consecutive years.
      - Elementary schools must meet their High Needs subject area targets.
      - High schools must meet their High Needs subgroup subject area targets and six-year cohort graduation rate targets.

### **Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership**

Principle 3 concerns the development, adoption, and implementation of a high-quality evaluation and support system for all certified teachers and administrators below the rank of superintendent.

The 2015 Flexibility Renewal Request will document the state's ongoing work with stakeholders to administer and improve Connecticut's educator evaluation and support system.

To meet the USED's waiver requirements, Connecticut undertook the following:

- Developed, adopted, and moved forward with 2014-15 statewide implementation of Connecticut's new educator evaluation and support system, with the exception of some unique educational entities.
- While early adoption focused on the mechanics of the system, progress continues to be made toward realizing a new vision of professional learning to support educators across their career continuum.
- Through collaboration with stakeholders and a commitment to continuous improvement, several refinements have been made to the initial pilot of the educator evaluation and support system; comprehensive training programs and technical supports have also been provided to all local education agencies (LEAs).

To obtain continued approval of the USED, Connecticut must make the following commitments:

- Continued involvement of educators in the development and continuous improvement of the guidelines.
- Ensure that each LEA develops, adopts, and implements, with the involvement of teachers and administrators—including mechanisms to review, revise, and improve—high-quality educator evaluation and support systems consistent with the CSDE's adopted guidelines.
- Incorporate student growth based on state assessments into educator ratings.

The CSDE plans to propose the following in its 2015 Flexibility Renewal Request:

- The USED has allowed states to request an additional one-year delay on the incorporation of student performance on statewide assessments into educator evaluations. The CSDE will request this continued flexibility until the 2016-17 school year.
- Provide an additional one-year waiver for implementation with Pre-K, adult education, Unified School District #1/Unified School District #2, and Approved Private Special Education Programs (APSEPs) until 2016-17.
- Require the implementation of the guidelines for charter school and central office administrators in 2015-16.
- Update the resources provided to support students with disabilities, English language learners, and nontested grades and subjects.
- Continue advancing our professional learning work, inclusive of a statewide rollout in spring 2015.